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ABSTRACT

There has been little research linking similarity between spouses on any aspect of maturity and marital adjustment. As part of a large-scale, longitudinal project on family relations, five dimensions of intimacy (relationship orientation, caring/concern, sexuality, commitment, communication) and three broad levels of intimacy maturity were identified. Congruence of intimacy was calculated on each of the five intimacy dimensions in a sample of 31 married couples who completed Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale and were interviewed individually with an adaptation of Orlofsky's interview assessing intimate relationships. The results indicated that congruence on the dimension of communication was significantly related to marital adjustment in both husbands and wives. In addition, congruence in commitment and relationship orientation was related to adjustment among husbands, but not among wives. These findings suggest that congruence in communication maturity is important to both partners, but for husbands, congruence in other areas of intimacy maturity is important as well. These results support the belief that each partner may conceptualize the relationship differently and be influenced by a different set of factors. (NRB)

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MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AND CONGRUENCE IN INTIMACY MATURITY

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SHORT ABSTRACT FORMS

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MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AND CONGRUENCE IN INTIMACY MATURITY. JOSEPH C. SPEISMAN, SCOTT BARTIS, KATHLEEN M. WHITE, & DARYL COSTOS, Boston University.

In a sample of married couples, congruence in intimacy maturity was calculated on each of five intimacy dimensions. Congruence on the dimension of communication was significantly related to marital adjustment in both husbands and wives. In addition, congruence in commitment and relationship orientation was related to adjustment among husbands, but not among wives. These results support the belief that each partner may conceptualize the relationship differently as well as be influenced by a different set of factors.

Topical Session Preferences

[illegible]

Developmental: Adult

Personality: Family

Social: Interpersonal Relations

Social: Social Developmental

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1. Marital adjustment and congruence in intimacy maturity

2. Topical Session Preference: 1) Developmental: Adult; 2) Personality: Family; 3) Social: Interpersonal Relations; 4) Social: Social Developmental

3. Problem or Major Purpose:

Previous research on the relationship between spousal agreement or similarity and marital adjustment has focused on issues such as preferred frequency of coitus (Wallin & Clark, 1959) and the areas of the relationship that need to be changed (Tiggle, Peters, Kelley, & Vincent, 1982). With the exception of a study by Nettles and Loevinger (1983), there has been little research linking similarity between spouses on any aspect of maturity and marital adjustment. Nettles and Loevinger failed to find a relationship between similarity in level of maturity (ego level) and adjustment. A number of serious limitations, including an imprecise measure of adjustment (being in marriage counselling), preclude any final conclusions being drawn from this study.

As part of a large-scale, longitudinal project on family relations, the present authors have identified five dimensions of intimacy: relationship orientation, caring/concern, sexuality, commitment, and communication. Underlying this conceptualization of intimacy is the belief that, at any given time, individuals can be characterized in terms of the level of maturity they are expressing within a relationship. We have identified three broad

levels of maturity based on subjects' capacity to differentiate and integrate their own perspective with that of their spouse and to respond emotionally and behaviorally in a complex manner acknowledging the unique characteristics and needs of the spouse.

The concept of intimacy maturity makes it possible to assess each partner's relationship maturity and to examine the extent to which spouses are similar (i.e., "congruent") to each other in relationship maturity. In the present study, we examined the relationship between congruence in intimacy maturity and marital adjustment.

4. Subjects

Subjects were 31 couples who participated in a larger study of family relationships. At the time of testing, subjects were in their mid to late twenties and had been married for 3-4 years.

5. Procedure

Dyadic Adjustment. Dyadic adjustment was determined by subject's total score on Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), an objective relationship inventory.

Intimacy Maturity. Subjects were interviewed individually with an adaptation of Orlofsky's interview (Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973) assessing intimate relationships. These interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed for scoring.

The five dimensions of intimacy that were examined were: communication--discussion of a range of topics, responsiveness and problem resolution; relationship orientation--basic cognitive, affective and behavioral orientation to the other and

the relationship; concern/caring--physical and emotional affection and support; sexuality--mutuality and integration of psychological as well as physical needs of self and spouse; commitment--investment in the marriage and in the particular partner.

Three trained scorers independently scored each subject's transcript on 11-point scales for the maturity of the behavior, affect and cognition brought to each dimension. Once each scorer had rated the protocols, scores were compared in order to arrive at one final score per dimension for each subject. Disagreements among scorers were resolved by discussion. The average correlation between each scorer's independently-derived scores and the final score was .80. It is these final scores that were used as data in the present study.

6. Results

For each intimacy dimension, congruence was determined by subtracting the wives' score from that of her husband. Congruent individuals were defined as those who were within one scale point of their spouse. Incongruent individuals differed from their spouse by more than one point. T-tests were calculated to determine whether husbands and wives who were congruent with their spouse in intimacy maturity differed in dyadic adjustment from individuals who were not congruent with their spouse. All results were analyzed separately for husbands and wives.

The results for husbands are presented in Table 1. On the dimensions of communication, orientation and commitment, husbands

who were congruent with their wives scored significantly higher on dyadic adjustment than did incongruent husbands. For the other two dimensions (concern/caring and sexuality), there were no significant differences in marital adjustment between congruent and incongruent husbands.

A different patter of results, summarized in Table 2, was obtained for the wives sample. Only on the communication dimension were congruent and incongruent wives different in dyadic adustment. Consistent with the data from husbands, wives who were congruent with their partner in communication maturity were significantly higher in marital adjustment than wives who were incongruent with their partner.

7. Implications and Conclusions

The present finding that congruence in communication was related to adjustment in both husbands and wives supports the belief that communication is a "core dimension" of marriage (Hawkins, Weisberg, & Ray, 1980). In addition, among husbands, but not wives, congruence in orientation and commitment was associated with marital adjustment. These results demonstrate that, overall, congruence in communication maturity is important to both partners, but for husbands, congruence in other areas of intimacy maturity is important as well.

The finding that congruence in intimacy maturity and marital adjustment were differentially related for husbands versus wives is just one of a number of findings, both from our research, and that of others (cf. Barry, 1970), of gender differences, not so

much in the realm of isolated variables as in the interrelationships among variables. These findings suggest that it is inappropriate to speak of "the couple" or "the marriage" since each partner may conceptualize the relationship differently as well as be influenced by a different set of factors. Bernard (1964) has argued that in every marriage there are, in fact, two marriages--his and hers. The present study underscores this point and suggests that the concept of intimacy maturity merits more attention by researchers interested in understanding each partner's conception of the relationship as well as gaining insight into marital adjustment and the factors associated with it.

8. References

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Table 1

Mean Dyadic Adjustment Scores: Husbands

Congruence Group	Dimensions of Intimacy Maturity				
	Orientation	Concern/Caring	Sexuality	Commitment	Communication
Congruent (n)	146.4 (10)	142.6 (11)	143.3 (16)	149.0 (11)	147.2 (15)
Incongruent (n)	136.2 (21)	137.8 (20)	135.6 (15)	134.3 (20)	132.3 (16)
	t = 2.08*	t = 0.85	t = 1.43	t = 3.16**	t = 3.06**

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Table 2

Mean Dyadic Adjustment Scores: Wives

Congruence Group	Dimensions of Intimacy Maturity				
	Orientation	Concern/Caring	Sexuality	Commitment	Communication
Congruent (n)	143.8 (10)	138.4 (11)	138.6 (16)	142.6 (11)	143.5 (15)
Incongruent (n)	137.7 (21)	140.4 (20)	140.8 (15)	138.0 (20)	136.1 (16)
	t = 1.55	t = -0.49	t = -0.63	t = 1.39	t = 2.34*

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

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